

Effect of Sport Education on Stress and Assertiveness of Middle School Students

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of basic tennis education on stress and assertiveness levels among middle school students.

Material: The study group consisted of a total of 120 students, 60 females and 60 males, aged 9-11 years. The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule and the Perceived Stress Scale for Children were used as data collection tools, and a questionnaire was administered to gather demographic information of the participants. The data were transferred to IBM SPSS 25.0 package program and analyzed using paired samples t-test.

Results: As a result of the statistical analyses performed on the data obtained in the pretest and posttest at $p < 0.05$ significance level, significant differences were found between assertiveness and stress scores of the male participants; between assertiveness and stress scores of the female participants; and between assertiveness and stress scores of the whole study group regardless of gender differences.

Conclusions: Pretest and posttest results revealed that there was a significant effect of basic tennis training on the increase in assertiveness levels and the decrease in stress levels among female and male students ($p < 0.05$).

Keywords: education, tennis, assertiveness, stress

1. Introduction

Assertiveness, shyness, and aggression are popular and frequently used concepts of today. While assertiveness is defined as protecting oneself and one's rights and expressing oneself without harming the rights of others, assertiveness is defined as a way of conceptualizing one's own perceptions about commitment, control, and challenge that help people manage themselves in stressful situations (Maddi & Khoshaba, 1994). Assertiveness is a life skill that can increase through activities, develops self-confidence and social communication skills of individuals to enable them to exercise their rights and to respect the rights of others, and ultimately increases life satisfaction and happiness in life (Lin et al., 2004). Assertive individuals have no difficulty in establishing close relationships with others, can prevent others from abusing them, and may have a wide range of positive and negative feelings without violating the rights of others (Avşar & Alkaya, 2017).

It is important that adults who frequently communicate and interact with children have the skills to establish healthy individual relationships because a child's growth as an individual, who has a solid self-confidence, intrinsic control, advanced social skills such as responsibility, solidarity, sharing, and cooperation, and can establish positive relationships with others, is shaped with the help of its interactions with family members and the environment. The effect of the family is critical on the psycho-social and personality developments in childhood. Individuals can acquire assertive behavior skills especially through childhood education. For school age children, their friends, school, course success and physical competencies are very important (Gönener & Pek, 2009). In early childhood, children take critical steps in the stages of both emotional and cognitive developments. Children in this period can describe basic emotional expressions (happiness, anger, sadness, fear) (Denham, 1986). The appropriate assertiveness education provided to children from early ages helps them choose the appropriate types of behavior for each situation, build self-confidence, and express their thoughts and feelings (Manesh et al., 2015).

Accordingly, it is necessary to organize supportive education sessions for adults with children in early childhood, where development is the fastest and most affected by the environment. The concept of stress, on the other hand, is defined as a significant imbalance between physical or psychological desire and response capacity in cases where

a request is not satisfied (McGrath, 1970). Many education techniques are available to reduce cognitive stress and anxiety. The most known ones are relaxation response, autogenic exercise, systematic desensitization, stress management, and stress immunization (Wolpe, 1968; Schultz & Luthe, 1969; Meichenbaum & Deffenbacher, 1988; Weinberg & Gould, 2015).

The only purpose of education should not be to teach children some subjects and prepare them for professional life. Despite the wrong perception that schools should only teach theoretically-weighted courses, the ultimate task of schools is to create a learning environment and to gain students daily physical activity habit (Şentürk, Yılmaz, & Gönener, 2015). In addition, what should be one of the basic functions of education is to prepare students for communication, which is the most important part of human relations, and situations that may be encountered in daily life (Kaf, 1999). In order for society to gain good and strong people, and thus to be a healthy one, people need to have a good quality education, which will be achieved with the help of discussing, understanding and experiencing. Such education will help healthy individuals to be gained in society. Various studies have shown that the participation of individuals in sports education contributes positively to their cognitive, affective and psychomotor developments. It is clear that sport plays a role in helping them being an assertive individual, and has a direct effect on the multidimensional development of individuals by providing positive development in self-confidence and self-control levels (Öztürk, Efe, & Koparan, 2007; García-López & Gutiérrez, 2015). It is emphasized that applied physical education is characterized by meaningful activities, can be used as a means of coping with some psychological and social problems, assertiveness is one of the goals in such activities, and it should be considered as education in itself (Etzel-Wise & Mears, 2004).

In the studies conducted between those who do sports and those who do not, it was found that those who did sports are livelier, more extroverted, more hardworking, more patient, more ready to establish social relations, more emotionally balanced, and adapt to a new situation more easily than those who did not do sports (Tiryaki, 1991). In this context, it can be thought that sports activities are effective on assertiveness levels among individuals (Büyükyazı, Saraçoğlu, Karadeniz, Çamlıyer, & Çamlıyer, 2003). In the light of above-mentioned information, the hypothesis of our study was based on the assumption that basic tennis education will have a positive effect on stress and assertiveness levels among secondary school students.

2. Method

2.1 Research Sample

The study group consisted of a total of 120 students, 60 females and 60 males, aged 9-11 years. The study group was given basic tennis education three days a week for 1.5 hours and the educations continued for 16 weeks. The educations were done in Izmit Tennis Club.

2.2 Research Design

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of basic tennis education on stress and assertiveness levels among middle school students. The experimental study method was used. Pre-test and post-test after 16-week-education were planned.

2.3 Training Programme

Table 1. General training programme

General training programme			
1st-4th Weeks	5th-8th Weeks	9th-12th Weeks	13th-16th Weeks
General warm-up: 5' jogging 5' stretching 10' physical education games	General warm-up: 10' jogging 5' stretching 10' physical education games 3' rest	General warm-up: 10' jogging 5' stretching 10' physical education games 3' rest	General warm-up: 10' jogging 5' stretching 10' physical education games 3' rest
Main unit: 10' Forehand-backhand grip techniques 3' rest 10' ball bouncing with racket 3' rest 10' mini court forehand block 3' rest 10' mini court backhand block	Main unit: 15' ladder footwork training 2' rest 5' short court block forehand 5' short court block backhand 2' rest 10' block forehand-backhand parallel to target	Main unit: 10' serve positioning, ball throwing and catching for serving 5' serving 2' rest 10' half court rally 2' rest 10' baseline rally	Main unit: 10' serve-return 10' half court rally 2' rest 10' baseline rally 10' crosscourt rally
Cooldown: 5' cooldown-stretching	Cooldown: 10' cooldown-physical education games-stretching	Cooldown: 10' cooldown-physical education games-stretching	Cooldown: 10' cooldown-physical education games-stretching
Total duration: 74'	Total duration:72'	Total duration:77'	Total durations: 80'

2.4 Data Collection

The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule and the Perceived Stress Scale for Children were used as data collection tools, and a questionnaire was administered to gather demographic information of the participants. The scales were administered to the students, and the data were collected by the researcher himself. Before the administration of the scales, the students were informed about the aim and context of the study. Each scale was administered for 10 minutes. It is an inventory called "The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule," that was generated in the USA (Rathus, 1973). It is also adopted to Turkish (Voltan, 1980). This inventory identifies the degree of assertiveness in the behavioral norms of individuals. It is an inventory that consists of 30 positive and negative items to determine the assertiveness of students. The RAS consists of 6-point Likert-type statements that can be scored as "Very much like me," "Rather like me," "Slightly like me," "Slightly unlike me," "Rather unlike me," and "Very much unlike me." While the top score one can obtain is 30 in the shyness dimension, it is 180 in the assertiveness dimension. There are 13 positive statements in the scale, which are items 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 18, 20, 21, 22, 25, 27, 28, and 29. The scores of these positive statements are "Very much like me" - 6 points, "Rather like me" - 5 points, "Slightly like me" - 4 points, "Slightly unlike me" - 3 points, "Rather unlike me" - 2 points, and "Very much unlike me" - 1 point. On the other hand, there are 17 negative statements in the scale, which are items 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 23, 24, 26, and 30. Negative statements are coded as the reverse of positive ones and scored reversely. The sum of scores of the participants in each statement was interpreted according to the following grouping, and it was decided on the conditions of assertiveness or shyness. The grouping is done in a way that the one with a score 30-80 is shy; the one with a score 80-130 is moderately shy; the one with a score 130-180 is assertive (Hoşgör, Arslan-Kurtuluş, Gündüz-Hoşgör, & Selma, 2017). The Perceived Stress Scale for Children (8-11 years) was used in the study (Snoeren-Hoefnagels, 2014; Oral & Ersan, 2017). This is a unidimensional and 4-point Likert-type scale which consists of 9 items. Higher scores on the scale mean higher the stress level one has. The total score that can be obtained by the participants on the scale, which has no reverse item, ranges from 0 to 27 points.

2.5 Data Analysis

IBM SPSS 25 for Windows (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) statistical program was utilized for the analysis and interpretation of the data collected employing the scales. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine whether the data obtained after the calculation of descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage) satisfied normal distribution conditions. Since the data satisfied normal distribution

conditions, the statistical procedures continued with parametric tests. Paired Samples T-Test was used to make pretest and posttest comparisons of the data obtained from the participants. The significance level was taken as $p < 0.05$.

3. Results

The findings obtained in this study are presented below.

Table 2. Distribution of the student's ages.

	Gender	n	Mean \pm SD	min.	max.
Age	Male	60	10.35 \pm 0.89	9	11
	Female	60	10.23 \pm 0.99	9	11
	Total	120	10.29 \pm 0.94	9	11

Table 3. Distribution of the study group's responses to demographic questions

QUESTIONS	MALE		FEMALE		
	N	%	n	%	
What is your mother's education level?	University	55	91.7	49	81.7
	High School	5	8.3	11	18.3
What is your father's education level?	University	41	68.3	44	73.3
	High School	18	30.0	15	25.0
	Middle School	1	1.7	1	1.7
How many siblings do you have?	Only child	22	36.7	16	26.7
	One	33	55.0	38	63.3
	Two	4	6.7	2	3.3
What is the property status of the house you currently live?	Homeowner	49	81.7	46	76.7
	Lodgement	5	8.3	5	8.3
	For rent	6	10.0	9	15.0
Are your parents alive?	Both are alive	59	98.3	60	100
	Only my father is alive	1	1.7		
What is the income level of your family?	Less than TRY 2000			1	1.7
	More than TRY 2001	2	3.3	1	1.7
	More than TRY 2500	7	11.7	10	16.7
	More than TRY 3000	19	31.7	19	31.7
	More than TRY 3500s	32	53.3	29	48.3

91.7% of males and 81.7% of females have mothers with university degree; 68.3% of males and 73.3% of females have fathers with university degree; 55% of males and 63.3% of females have only one sibling; 81.7% of males and 76.7% of females live in their own homes; and parents of 98.3% of males and 100% of females are alive. 53.3% of males and 48.3% of females had a family income of 3500 TL and over.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of male and female participants' Rathus assertiveness schedule and perceived stress scale scores

		n	Mean±SD	Min	Max
Scores on the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule	Male pretest	60	111.43±9.56	89	136
	Female pretest	60	112.10±7.6	95	135
	Total pretest	120	111.76±8.61	89	136
	Male posttest	60	125.00±9.26	107	144
	Female posttest	60	122.81±13.04	89	145
	Total posttest	120	123.90±11.32	89	145
Scores on the Perceived Stress Scale for Children	Male pretest	60	17.06±4.2	10	25
	Female pretest	60	17.33±4.0	12	26
	Total pretest	120	17.20±4.09	10	26
	Male posttest	60	14.53±3.86	6	22
	Female posttest	60	14.91±4.24	7	24
	Total posttest	120	14.72±4.05	6	24

The mean age was found to be 10.35 ± 0.89 for males and 10.23 ± 0.99 for females. While males' pretest and posttest scores on the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule were found to be 111.43 ± 9.56 and 125.00 ± 9.26 , respectively, females' scores were found to be 112.10 ± 7.60 and 122.81 ± 13.04 , respectively.

On the other hand, males' pretest and posttest perceived stress scores were found to be 17.06 ± 4.2 and 14.53 ± 3.86 , respectively while the scores of females in the same parameter were 17.33 ± 4.0 and 14.91 ± 4.24 , respectively.

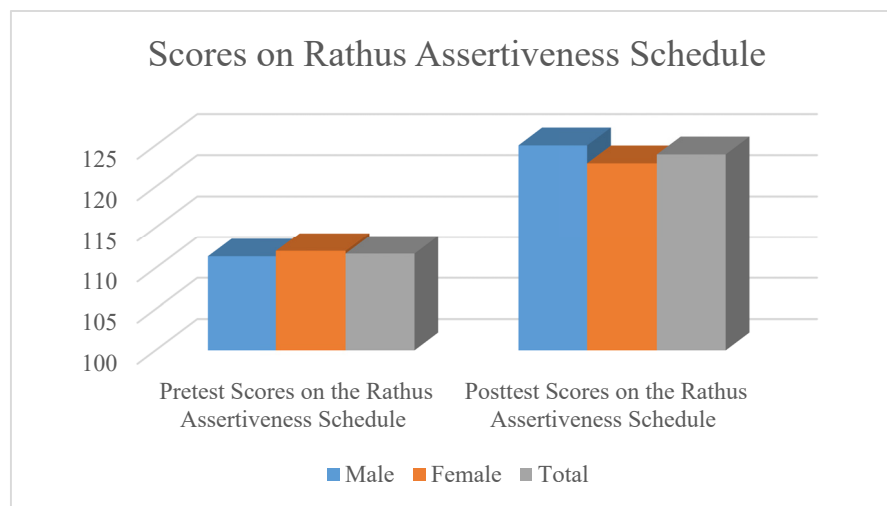


Figure 1. Scores of Rathus assertiveness schedule

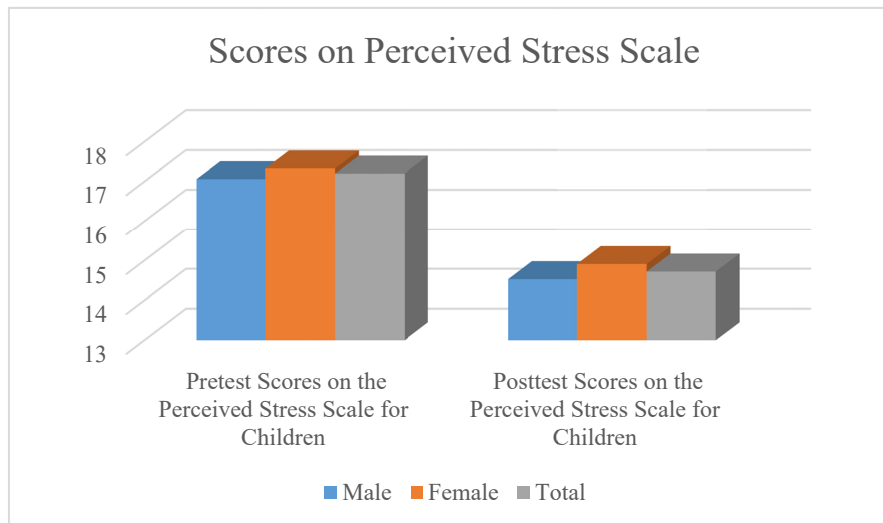


Figure 2. Scores on perceived stress scale

Table 5. Results of pre-test and post-test scores of male participants

Variable	t	p
Scores on the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule	7.511	.000*
Scores on the Perceived Stress Scale for Children	8.069	.000*

A significant difference was found between pretest and posttest scores of males in the assertiveness and stress variables at $p < 0.05$ level.

Table 6. Results of pre-test and post-test scores of female participants

Variable	t	p
Scores on the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule	5.421	.000*
Scores on the Perceived Stress Scale for Children	7.679	.000*

A significant difference was found between pretest and posttest scores of females in the assertiveness and stress variables at $p < 0.05$ level.

Table 7. Results of pre-test and post-test scores of whole participants

Variable	t	p
Scores on the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule	9.064	.000*
Scores on the Perceived Stress Scale for Children	11.179	.000*

It is indicated that a significant difference was found between pretest and posttest scores of the whole study group in the assertiveness and stress variables at $p < 0.05$ level.

4. Discussion

Pretest and posttest results in our study revealed that there was a significant effect of basic tennis education on the increase in assertiveness levels and the decrease in stress levels among female and male students ($p < 0.05$). Such results may infer that tennis education positively affects students' personal development. Previous studies in the literature emphasize that play-based and physical education and sports education contributes significantly to students' psychosocial development, improve assertiveness, and develop students' personal communication skills (Etzel-Wise & Mears, 2004; Durualp & Aral, 2010). In a study in which the effects of the classes with play-based learning approach and traditional learning approach on children's freedom levels were observed, it was found that autonomous behaviors of children were more flexible in classes with play-based learning approach and children restricted themselves more in classes with traditional learning approach (Walsh et al, 2006).

The guidance from families is as important as children's wishes in their tendency to sports education and playing. Families may, of course, desire their children to do sports, albeit another important factor is parental expectations for their children's success. Sports success may lie under the concepts of social skills or cognitive development. In a study conducted on students aged 11-14, it was stated that handball exercises significantly increased the assertiveness of students and that more sports education improved students' skills of comprehension, adoption of different roles, and multi-faceted thinking (García-López & Gutiérrez, 2015). In a study conducted on children aged 12-14, it was stated that children doing sports were more assertive than those who did not do sports (Özşaker, 2013). Besides, in their study conducted on middle school students, it is stated that the emotional regulation of students doing sports showed a significant difference compared to the ones who did not do sports and that sports had a positive effect on emotional regulation (Çebi, Yamak, & Öztürk, 2016). Following an approach that will cover more than one sports branch in sports education for particularly elementary and middle school students contributes to their motor development and goal orientation, which support children's participation in physical activities. Besides, it is clear that sports education given to children by experts significantly supports children's appropriate physical and psychological developments, which will enable them to become healthy individuals and a part of the society, and in this context, sports and sports education have significant contributions to students' assertiveness levels and social development.

In addition to the age group in our study, there are also studies examining the effects of sports education on assertiveness among different age groups. In a study conducted on male athletes aged 13-19 who had a sports history of at least one year, it was determined that these athletes had assertive personalities (Bavlı, 2009). In a study conducted with female students aged 14-16 who had basic handball education, it was stated that handball exercises applied for 9 months significantly increased the social competence and assertiveness of the students (Öztürk et al., 2007). It can be seen that sports education has positive effects on the assertiveness and social competence in not only a certain age group but also many age groups. Assertiveness training and stress control exercises should be done in addition to sports education. Sports education and mental exercises should be approached from a holistic perspective and must be included in education programs of students. Connelly and Rotella (1991) stated that assertiveness education had an important role in addressing and preventing unresolved communication problems and that they believed that education would support the development of assertiveness skills and personal development.

Based on this idea, it is thought that any kind of education that can increase assertiveness in younger age groups can improve the assertiveness of children and help them take a more active role in individual and group activities. It can be said that factors such as the traditional cultural elements of our society, authoritarian parental attitudes, repressive raising methods, and rapid social and cultural changes cause various problems in the development of individuals. Such challenges can be thought to affect adversely one's ability to express itself and to struggle with difficulties. For this reason, families and educational institutions should directly support the students to receive sports education. It should be stated that implementing a sports education program, covering any kind of supports to ensure the positive development of students who are in developmental age, will be helpful.

In order to improve the social development of students in the formal education process and increase their level of assertiveness, it may be necessary to add and increase the frequency of play-based sports education in annual curricula and to update the existing plans and programs considering such points. Studies can be designed with different methodologies to determine whether the developments obtained after the periodic education are permanent or temporary so that the importance of the continuity of sports education can be revealed. Longitudinal studies can be conducted to uncover the effects of long-term sports education on different personality traits. In addition to the age group in our study, it is useful to conduct similar studies in different age groups and compare the results.

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